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ABSTRACT

Inquiry-centered staff development requires that adult literacy practitioners (adult educators, tutors, and administrators) function simultaneously as learners, researchers, and reformers performing the following actions: forming research communities within program or across program sites; using literature and their own experiences to investigate issues in the field collectively; generating research questions and conducting systematic inquiries into teaching, learning, and administration in their own program settings; organizing their research as social and collaborative processes; and disseminating their findings through oral and written presentations. The beginnings of inquiry-centered staff development may be traced to the action research movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Project, which features biweekly seminars, has provided a strategic research site and research method for practitioners to conduct program-based inquiries into daily practice. A study of the design and initiation of inquiry projects by adult literacy practitioners has confirmed that practitioner research identifies and investigates a distinctive set of problems in practice and demonstrates that understanding practice cannot be accomplished by university researchers alone. (Appended is a table detailing practitioner researchers, programs, positions, and research questions. Contains 44 references.) (MN)

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NATIONAL CENTER ON ADULT LITERACY

INITIATING PRACTITIONER INQUIRY:

ADULT LITERACY TEACHERS, TUTORS, AND ADMINISTRATORS RESEARCH THEIR PRACTICE

Susan L. Lytle
Alisa Belzer
Rebecca Reumann

University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA

NCAL TECHNICAL REPORT TR93-11
NOVEMBER 1993

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INITIATING PRACTITIONER INQUIRY:

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ABSTRACT

Inquiry-based staff development offers a promising direction for rethinking both practice and research on practice in adult literacy education. Defined as a range of approaches to adult learning that purposefully build on the richness and diversity of real-world experience and knowledge that teachers, tutors, and administrators currently bring to the field, inquiry-based staff development positions literacy practitioners as learners, researchers, and reformers.

This report is the second in a series focusing on a particular type of inquiry-based staff development referred to as "inquiry-centered." In inquiry-centered staff development, practitioners form a research community to critically analyze their own experiences and the literature from a field-based perspective. They conduct systematic and intentional inquiries into teaching, learning, and administration in their own program settings, and organize their research as social and collaborative processes. Finally, they disseminate their findings through a variety of oral and written presentations. Inquiry-centered staff development thus supports the professional development of program-based practitioners and contributes to the knowledge base of the local community and the field as a whole.

Using data from a community of teachers, tutors, and administrators who conducted research into their daily practice as part of their participation in the Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Project (ALPIP), this report explores how literacy practitioners initiate inquiry by generating questions and methods from their particular contexts. Inquiry projects reveal

ways that literacy practitioners are attempting to understand their own situations, often in relation to profound tensions and disjunctions in the wider field of adult literacy education. These practitioner inquiry projects emerge from dissonance created by complex interactions among factors related to the person, the context, and the demands of daily practice, and they are guided by interpretative questions that reflect their distinctive settings and the researchers' immediate, consequential relationships to particular learners and programs. To conduct inquiries based in their own classroom and program sites, practitioners select research methods that are uniquely wedded to practice and thus function to re-invent conventional relationships of teaching and learning, research and action, and researcher and researched.

This approach to practitioner inquiry provides a pointed contrast to more traditional forms of staff/professional development. The report argues that to link professional development with systemic reform of the field, networks and forums are needed for enhancing the intellectual lives of literacy workers and for disseminating the knowledge being generated in practitioner communities.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is the second in a series of reports exploring inquiry-based staff development as a significant process for rethinking practice as well as research on practice in adult literacy education. Inquiry-based staff development is defined as the range of approaches to adult learning that purposefully builds on the richness and diversity of real-world experience and the knowledge that teachers, tutors, and administrators bring to the field. In these approaches, practitioners pose the questions and conduct field-based inquiry into daily practice. In contrast to the assumption that literacy practitioners, like their adult students, have deficiencies needing remediation, this stance on staff/professional development explicitly positions practitioners as learners, researchers, and reformers.

As we have argued elsewhere (see Lytle, Belzer, & Reumann, 1992), the concept of inquiry-based staff development derives from a set of fundamental assumptions about relationships among literacy education, staff development, and the reform of practice and research. Improving practice and professionalizing the field, from this perspective, depend on understanding and using practitioners' prior knowledge and experience, treating classrooms and programs as critical sites of inquiry, and building communities and networks of practitioners that function over time as supportive contexts for generating and disseminating new knowledge from and for the field. By developing a program of conceptual and empirical research on the practice of inquiry-based staff development, we make the argument that the field of adult literacy education urgently needs practitioners who position themselves as generators as well as consumers of knowledge and who regard their own professional development as inextricably linked to programmatic and systemic change.

This paper focuses on a particular type of inquiry-based staff development that we refer to as *inquiry-centered*, that is, staff development in which practitioners (a) form a research community from within a program or across a range of program sites; (b) undertake a collaborative investigation of selected issues in the field, using the literature and their own experiences, through which they critically analyze current theory and research from a field-based perspective; (c) generate research questions and conduct systematic and intentional inquiries into teaching, learning, and administration in their own program settings;

(d) organize their research as social and collaborative processes; and (e) disseminate their findings through a range of oral and written presentations. Inquiry-centered staff development is designed to support the professional development of program-based practitioners and to contribute to the knowledge base of the local community and the field as a whole.

The report is divided into several parts. First, we locate the concept of practitioner inquiry within the wide frame of the national movement for teacher research. Next, we describe the Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Project and, in particular, the practitioner Seminar as the context for studying the implementation of inquiry-centered staff development in adult literacy education. In the third section, we report findings related to the design and initiation of inquiry projects by adult literacy teachers, tutors, and administrators. These findings explore the substantive domains that practitioners chose to study, the nature and sources of their particular questions, and where they looked for evidence in their daily practice; in other words, what counted as data and how it was collected. The report concludes with further implications for staff development in adult literacy education.

FRAMEWORKS FOR PRACTITIONER INQUIRY

The notion of practitioner as researcher can be traced to the *action research* movement of the 1950s and 1960s.[1] Lewin (1948) characterized this work as "comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action" (pp. 202-203). A center established by Stenhouse and his colleagues in the United Kingdom took as its goal to "demystify and democratize research which was seen as failing to contribute effectively to the growth of professional understanding and to the improvement of professional practice" (Stenhouse, cited in Ruddick & Hopkins, 1985, p. 1). Stenhouse and his colleagues encouraged teachers to become intimately involved in the research process and to use research to strengthen their own judgments and to improve their practice.

In the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, the concept of teacher as researcher took various forms. Patricia Carini and her colleagues at the Prospect School in Bennington, Vermont, focused on developing processes for documenting learning in educational contexts through qualitative teacher research and collaboration. Some other investigators modeled teacher research on more traditional university-based social science research (Myers, 1985), while others (Mohr & Maclean, 1987; Bissex & Bullock, 1987; Goswami & Stillman, 1987) argued that teacher research is essentially a new genre, not necessarily bound by the constraints of traditional research paradigms. They urged teachers to identify their own questions, document observations, analyze and interpret their data in light of their current theories, and share their results primarily with other teachers. Kincheloe (1991), Carr and Kemmis (1986), and others whose perspective is grounded in critical social theory emphasized the liberatory function of teacher research as part of a larger effort toward what they call a more participatory democracy.

In the current literature, terms such as *action research*, *critical action research*, and *teacher research* have a wide range of meanings and purposes. Action research itself has a variety of iterations (see Oberg & McCutcheon, 1990, for a discussion of various forms of action research)—from those that are predominantly positivist or interpretivist to those associated primarily with critical science (called critical action research). As

Carson (1990) points out, all appear to have in common the assumption that people learn from practice, that is, that they may "develop their understandings while at the same time bringing about changes in concrete situations" (p. 167). Most accounts of action research refer to a cycle of reflection, planning, action, observing, reflecting, replanning, and so forth.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) point out that although the terms teacher research and action research are relatively new, their underlying conceptions of teaching and the role of teachers are not. Early in the century, Dewey (1904) criticized educational development as proceeding reactively by jumping uncritically from one new technique to the next. The only remedy for this situation, he argued, were teachers who had learned to be "adequately moved by their own ideas and intelligence" (p. 16). Dewey emphasized that teachers need to be students of learning—both consumers and producers of knowledge—a concept that prefigures the concept of the *reflective practitioner* more recently developed in the work of Schön (1983, 1987), who depicts professional practice as an intellectual process of posing and exploring problems identified by the practitioners themselves.

Through their work with both preservice and in-service teachers, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) have developed a framework for teacher research. This framework is useful in conceptualizing *practitioner research* as it may be applied to staff development for adult literacy teachers, tutors, and administrators. Cochran-Smith and Lytle question the common assumption that knowledge about practice should be primarily *outside-in*, (i.e., generated by university- or center-based researchers and then used in schools or programs), a position that suggests the unproblematic transmission of knowledge from source to destination. Rather, they call attention to practitioners as knowers and to the complex relationships of knowledge and practice as embedded in local contexts and in the relations of power that structure the daily work of practitioners in both the field and the university. Practitioner research, the authors argue, has the potential to be a kind of *praxis* (Lather, 1986), that is, a research process located at the critical intersection of theory and practice. They propose a framework that defines and describes practitioner research, explores its status in relation to outside research on practice, describes the nature of knowledge created when practitioners do research, and suggests the implications of this notion on the wider knowledge base of the field and on development across the professional life span.

In the sections that follow, several of the major components of the Cochran-Smith and Lytle framework,[2] which inform the research reported here, are excerpted, adapted, and, in some cases, elaborated to fit the language and constructs common in adult literacy education.

Defining and Positioning Practitioner Research

What is largely missing from the field of research on adult literacy education are the voices of practitioners themselves—the questions that they ask and the interpretative frameworks that they use to understand and improve their practice. Defined as systematic and intentional inquiry carried out by teachers, tutors, and administrators in their own program workplaces,[3] practitioner research can inform and improve practice and make accessible some of the expertise of practitioners. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) define these terms as follows:

> *By systematic we refer primarily to ordered ways of gathering and recording information, documenting experiences inside and outside of classrooms, and making some kind of written record. Systematic also refers to ordered ways of recollecting, rethinking, and analyzing classroom events for which there may be only partial or unwritten records. By intentional, we signal that teacher research is an activity that is planned rather than spontaneous....By inquiry, we suggest that teacher research stems from or generates questions and reflects teachers' desires to make sense of their experiences—to adapt a learning stance or openness toward classroom life. (p. 24)*

Practitioner research may be empirical—involving the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data gathered in classrooms and at program sites—and take the form of journals, oral inquiries, or studies. It may also be conceptual—involving theoretical work or the analysis of ideas—and appear as essays on program life or the nature of practitioner research itself. Although it may involve taking action (i.e., intervening in response to a perceived problem or question by initiating a new approach), practitioner research may also entail examining and documenting an activity that is already underway.

Practitioner Research as a Way of Knowing

Efforts to codify a knowledge base for teaching have privileged one source of knowledge—that of university-based researchers—

over others. A different epistemology would regard systematic inquiry by field-based practitioners as a distinctive and important way of knowing about practice. Practitioners are uniquely positioned to provide an ***emic,*** or inside, view of practice in adult literacy education. Their research generates local knowledge, developed and used by practitioners and their immediate communities, as well as public knowledge, which is valuable to the larger community of practitioners, researchers, and policymakers.

Local knowledge refers to what practitioners come to understand about their own knowledge through individual research and what communities of practitioner-researchers come to know when they collaboratively build knowledge. Teachers, tutors, and administrators, together with adult learners, decide what counts as knowledge, who can have knowledge, and how knowledge can be generated, challenged, and evaluated. Through inquiry, practitioners come to understand how this process happens and how their interpretations of practice are shaped. By regarding classrooms and programs as sites of inquiry into learning and events as data, practitioners can examine and articulate their interpretive frameworks for understanding practice. This effectively blurs the lines between inquiry and teaching and between research and practice. When practitioners redefine their relationships to knowledge and to their students as knowers, they often reconstruct their practice to offer different opportunities for learners to learn and they realign their relationships with brokers of knowledge and power in programs and universities. When practitioners come together to form research communities, they conjoin their understandings to create knowledge in and for their own community.

Practitioner research also has the potential to contribute to public knowledge and thus to be a significant way of knowing for the larger communities of program- and university-based teachers and teacher educators, policymakers, funders, and administrators. It can provide data from an insider's perspective, open up new areas of study, and draw on the rich frameworks of those most deeply and intimately involved with practice in the field. Practitioner inquiry is typically case study research that yields conceptual frameworks and data that others can use to understand their own situations.

PRACTITIONER RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teaching and administering programs are intellectual activities that hinge on what Zumwalt (1982) calls the *deliberative* ability to reflect on and make wise decisions about practice. These programs

are assumed to be complicated and intentional, requiring that practitioners use their knowledge to choose methods, manage dilemmas, create curricula, and make strategic choices. In short, practice itself can be understood as an inquiry process, "every lesson...a quiet form of research" (Britton, 1987). When practice is linked to a more technical view, staff development is regarded as a vehicle for transmitting skills and knowledge to practitioners. An inquiry-based approach to staff development, in contrast to more conventional approaches, is premised on the notion that learning from practice is the primary task of development across the professional life span.

The notion of *learning from practice* suggests that inquiry be regarded as an integral part of and a critical basis for decisions about all practice. In this view, adult literacy programs and communities are both research sites and sources of knowledge most effectively accessed when practitioners collaboratively interrogate and enrich their theories of practice. The increasing complexity and diversity of the field of adult literacy suggest the difficulty of arriving at global solutions to problems or at monolithic strategies for providing learning opportunities for adult learners. In-service staff development programs need processes that prompt practitioners to construct their own questions and to begin to develop courses of action that are valid in local contexts and communities.

PRACTITIONER SEMINAR AS RESEARCH COMMUNITY

In the literature of K-12 education, there is considerable documentation of teachers' aversion to conventional in-service education activities. At the same time, networks across the country are attracting growing numbers of teachers committed to spending many extra hours struggling for educational change. As Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) point out, teachers are choosing to "become active in collegial networks because they afford occasion for professional development and colleagueship and reward practitioners with a renewed sense of purpose and efficacy" (p. 674). These networks are not generic; each is organized around a distinctive focus, provides varied activities, and creates discourse communities that encourage participants to take risks and commit to change in their own contexts. They also contribute to the professional lives of teachers by providing leadership opportunities, which many are parlaying into more active participation in teaching their colleagues or becoming more active in local, state, or national reform efforts.

In describing both the benefits and problems created by these new structures, Lieberman and McLaughlin raise issues about the quality of the innovations constructed, the difficulties and constraints on applying new practices and perspectives in the participants' places of work, the problem of maintaining stability and resources over time, and the limitations of current models of accountability or evaluation for illuminating the "total context within which teacher and student learning takes place" (p. 676). Lieberman and McLaughlin argue that traditional methods of evaluation cannot capture the nature and power of networks; standardized tests do not assess or account for changes in "adult and student behavior, attitudes, and learning."

Lieberman and McLaughlin conclude that the networks that have promoted profound changes in practice and in conceptions of professionalism reveal for policymakers that "the context in which educational change is pursued is everything" (p. 677). These networks concentrate on building communities of teacher-learners. Policymakers and others, they argue, should examine teacher networks with an *occupational* rather than an *organizational* lens, that is, focus not on what works, but on the meanings of practice to those working in the field. Policymakers can leverage change, they

suggest, by "concentrating on the environments available to support and stimulate teachers' professional growth" (p. 677).

Researching communities of practitioners are one example of a network formed to foster professional development and also to contribute to the knowledge base of the field. Intellectual communities of practitioner-researchers are networks of individuals who enter with others into "a common search" for meaning in their professional lives (Westerhoff, 1987, cited in Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992b) and who regard their research as part of larger efforts to reform education. Through their collaborative inquiries, they make their day-to-day practice *problematic,* meaning "not taking the common arrangements of [adult literacy education] as natural or inevitable, critically examining the ideologies and historical antecedents of current practices, and challenging rather than accepting prevailing explanations and attributions about the consequences of race, class, gender and ethnicity" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992b).

Research communities of practitioners function to overcome obstacles to professional growth and change such as those created by isolation, occupational socialization, and the unquestioned imposition of a knowledge base generated by those working outside of the actual context. Practitioner research communities have considerable potential to overcome these serious constraints. As practitioners redefine their own relationships to knowledge about literacy and learning, they also reconstruct teaching by offering learners new invitations to inquiry, restructuring relationships to colleagues, and taking leadership in their own classrooms, programs, and professional organizations. The work of practitioner communities has not been the subject of systematic study to date. There is a paucity of empirical data about (a) practitioner inquiry as a way of knowing about and improving the quality of teaching and learning, (b) how these groups function over time as opportunities for staff/professional development, (c) what supports and constrains these communities, and (d) the consequences of participation for practitioners in different contexts and across the professional life span.

The Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Project

The purpose of the Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Project has been to create a cross-program, field/university community of practitioner-researchers to function over time as a context for generating knowledge from a field-based perspective. This is being accomplished by simultaneously implementing and investigating the processes and outcomes of inquiry-centered collaborative

staff/professional development over a 3- to 4-year period. A biweekly Seminar, beginning its second year, has provided both a strategic research site and a research method for practitioners—teachers, tutors, and administrators in this case—to conduct program-based inquiries into daily practice based on issues related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, program evaluation, and staff development. It has also provided a strategic site for examining inquiry-centered staff development as a promising direction for the field of adult literacy.

DESIGN OF THE SEMINAR

After a competitive application process and two initial planning meetings, the Seminar formally began in September 1991. From September 1991 to June 1992, the group met biweekly for a total of 17 times. Designed jointly by participants and facilitators, these Seminar sessions provided time for collaborative inquiry and sharing in both large and small group formats. During the fall semester, participants were involved in conducting a common inquiry into adult literacy education by critical reading, discussion, and written response to current research literature in relation to their own practice. The group considered various definitions of literacy and adult literacy education, as well as current theory, research, and practice related to reading, writing, and assessment. In addition, it began to examine the literature on teacher and action research and on process-product and interpretive paradigms of research on teaching. Participants met in small journal groups (4 members) to discuss what they had read and written since the last session. This discussion was then continued and expanded as a whole group activity. Another small group setting, involving job-alike groups, concluded the Seminar meetings and provided participants with an opportunity to meet with others in the group with similar job responsibilities in order to share current work and similar problems.

In the spring semester, small groups were reconfigured as research groups. Each group was made up of participants whose inquiry projects clustered around common themes. Research group meetings were followed by a variety of large and small group activities focused on developing, implementing, and reporting on inquiry projects. A series of five meetings focused on assisting participants in the process of data analysis by creating frameworks and formats for looking descriptively at pieces of data collected by each participant.

Participants engaged in four formal writing activities: reading journals, reaction sheets, portfolios, and inquiry projects. They kept

reading journals that were intended to provide an ongoing record of participants' responses, experiences, and questions as they read current research literature and related it to their practice. These journal entries were viewed as a potential source for developing an inquiry project research question. At the end of every Seminar session, participants responded briefly to the activities of the day. These *reaction sheets* gave feedback to the Seminar facilitators and often served as a record for participants of their interests and questions. Between the fall and spring semesters, participants were asked to create a *portfolio* of their work to date, which included journal entries, notes, reaction sheets, and other materials. By reflecting on their work, participants were able to begin to identify dominant themes or questions that would form the bases of their inquiry projects. At the end of the spring semester, participants wrote about their *inquiry projects.* In general, the project write-ups followed a suggested format that named the research question and then described the source of the question, the context and methods of the research, the findings, and their implications.

Although subsequent technical reports will provide more detail about the curriculum of the Seminar and ways that the Seminar functioned as a research community, it is important to note here that the participant-constructed pre-Seminar interviews, the readings, and the design of specific sessions were all intended to provoke questions about assumptions that drive current practices and to raise critical issues from the literature of the field. Readings invited discussion about conflicting conceptions of literacy as well as the nature of reading, writing, and assessment. Participants' experiences and philosophies of teaching, learning, and adult education often differed from each other and from what was read. The Seminar, then, insofar as it included a selection of readings and group activities, was neither a neutral nor a narrowly didactic setting. Rather than engage in problem solving to resolve differences or reach a consensus, the group struggled to emphasize problem posing, observation, and clarification of diverse perspectives on issues and practices. Many of the readings, for example, argued for more participatory rather than traditional approaches. The dissonance experienced by Seminar members was, in part, traceable to the extent to which the ideas forwarded in the Seminar were compatible with the range of philosophies represented in its membership. Data on the evolution of the practitioner Seminar as a critical research community will be analyzed in subsequent reports on the project. Data analyzed will include the Seminar's participatory practices and the nature of the facilitation by field- and university-based leaders, as well as various other conflicts, issues, and problems that were raised.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR LONGITUDINAL STUDY

By implementing and documenting the Seminar over a 3- to 4-year period as a research community of practitioners, the longitudinal project aims to address several questions: (a) Through what processes and in what ways does practitioner research or inquiry contribute to individuals' professional knowledge and practice? How does regarding teaching or administering as processes of inquiry affect educators' day-to-day instructional decision making, community involvement, assessment strategies, and so forth? (b) What do field-based practitioner inquiries reveal about what facilitates or impedes adult literacy learning in various program contexts? (c) How do cross-program, field/university communities of practitioner-researchers function as contexts for collaborative staff/professional development in adult literacy?

DATA COLLECTION

Data to address these questions have been generated and used in two interrelated ways. First, data on teaching, learning, and administering in adult literacy programs were collected at program sites by the practitioner-researchers participating in the year-long inquiry Seminar and then analyzed and interpreted in collaboration with other Seminar participants, including university-based facilitators. Second, both practitioners and university-based researchers are currently investigating the processes and outcomes of the Seminar as a community of practitioner-researchers engaged in staff development and knowledge generation for the field.

More specifically, the design for data collection includes a case study of the practitioner research group as well as case studies of individual practitioner-researchers. Both have been constructed as co-investigations and models of practitioner research. Collecting data on the Seminar, for example, provides a model for the use of audiotapes, transcripts, field notes, and various artifacts as data for understanding collaborative work. By making the methods of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data as visible as possible, the stance toward inquiry in the Seminar has mirrored the research conducted in adult literacy classrooms and programs. Furthermore, the Seminar has provided a forum for identifying problematic issues such as beliefs, roles and power, and theory/practice relationships that are also the concern of practitioners in the field.

A critical component of data collection is the use of practitioner research as a method for exploring practitioners' knowledge, questions, and interpretative frameworks. This method

contrasts with more common methods of studying practice and practitioners, which typically focus on simplified and researcher-created tasks, constructs, or a priori categories. Consequently, these techniques do not account for the ways in which practice and practitioner inquiry are mediated by, and essentially embedded in, the cultures of classrooms, programs, and research communities. Practitioner research has the potential to be a particularly robust method for understanding staff/professional development because it emerges from practice and attempts to preserve peoples' own words and analyses. It addresses issues such as (a) how practitioners construct and reconstruct their knowledge and theories of practice, (b) how these may change and develop over time, and (c) how they impact on teaching and learning in classrooms and programs.

Data collected in the planning year of the project included documentation of planning sessions and initial interviews of Seminar participants (see Lytle et al., 1992). During the first year of the Seminar, all meetings were audiotaped and transcribed, and field notes were taken at each session. Artifacts of the Seminar meetings include applications, a syllabus, a bulkpack of readings, Seminar meeting agendas, handouts, reaction sheets, and Seminar memos. Memos summarizing the reaction sheets were sent to participants after every meeting. Participant artifacts include portfolios, data presented from individuals' projects, inquiry project abstracts, and project write-ups.

Standard methods of qualitative data analysis were used. Analytic categories that characterize practitioners' concepts, questions, methods, and interpretative frameworks were constructed during successive readings of the corpus of documents, through the process of analytic induction (Erickson, 1986). These categories were used to code document data and to identify typical and discrepant instances. This report draws on a subset of the data described above, including the initial interviews, portfolios, and inquiry projects of the 14 participants who completed the first year of the Seminar and who represented/studied 10 programs. The report addresses the following questions: (a) What do adult literacy practitioners make problematic about their practice? In other words, what aspects of adult literacy education or pervasive themes, issues, and problems do they seek to understand? (b) Where do their questions come from? Specifically, what aspects of their prior or current experience are most salient in formulating questions for inquiry into practice? Why are these issues significant for practitioners? (c) What is the nature of practitioner questions? How do they relate to research paradigms in the field and reflect

theory and/or practice? (d) Where do practitioners look for evidence? For example, what counts as data, and how is it collected?

INQUIRY PROJECTS: QUESTIONS IN CONTEXT

In the following sections, we explore the four major findings of the second phase of this longitudinal study on inquiry-based staff development.[4]

INTENT OF PRACTITIONERS' INQUIRIES

Inquiry projects reveal ways that literacy practitioners are attempting to understand their own situations, often in relation to profound tensions and disjunctions in the wider field of adult literacy education.

Although the data show that each of the inquiry questions developed by practitioners was unique to the particulars of individuals and the context of their practices, two central themes were found to cut across all of the projects. Each of the projects included an underlying, if not explicit, concern with understanding, defining, and investigating the nature of literacy and the power relationships in classes and programs. These concerns reflect the reality in the field: Not only are there competing paradigms of adult learning and literacy, but the wide range of program types—often with inconsistent assumptions about literacy learning and the nature of adult learners—can create uneasy and/or ill-defined mandates for teacher roles, appropriate curricula, and classroom and program formats.

While the definition of literacy has long been debated in scholarly literature in the field (cf., Venezky, Wagner, & Ciliberti, 1990), teachers and programs operate with explicit and implicit theories and definitions that guide daily practice. Ideas about the nature of literacy shape to some extent decisions about (a) what materials should be used for instruction, (b) what instructional formats work most effectively, (c) who should teach adult learners, (d) what teachers and administrators need to know to do their jobs, and (e) how learning should be assessed. Lytle and Wolfe (1989) have developed a conceptual framework that, if not comprehensive in its review of definitions of literacy, is helpful in understanding the major views or orientations towards literacy among the ALPIP participants. Lytle and Wolfe identify four views: literacy as skills, literacy as tasks, literacy as practices, and literacy as critical reflection/action. The first two views tend to define literacy in terms of neutral, technical skills that remain essentially

the same across contexts. The latter two views take a more sociopolitical stance towards literacy.

The *literacy as skills* view is one in which literacy is defined as a narrow set of technical skills that operate neutrally and independently from the context and purpose of the task. In this view, skills are broken down into small informational bits that can be ordered and taught sequentially. This view is most congruent with traditional notions of reading and writing instruction borrowed from elementary reading programs. The *literacy as tasks* view is similar to the idea of functional literacy. Sometimes this view signals an intermediate level of reading ability, which implies an adequate ability to take care of the basic real life tasks of reading and writing.

A *literacy as practices* view, in contrast, assumes that all reading and writing are ideological. This refers to a set of social practices from which context and purpose cannot be separated from the act or the ability to perform the task (Street, 1984). In this view of literacy, a reader's or writer's literacy practices vary depending on who is reading or writing what, with whom, and for what purposes. A *literacy as critical reflection* view is linked to literacy as practices, but it takes a more explicitly political stance. This view envisions literacy as a process of interpreting the world. Here, issues of race, class, gender, history, and social change are the subjects of literacy as well as ways of interpreting reading and writing tasks. Literacy is a tool for challenging, and ultimately changing, the status quo.

The fact that so many of the inquiry projects were wrestling with the nature of literacy—what should be the content of instruction, how should it be presented, in what ways should learners be involved, and what do practitioners need to know to do their jobs—reflects the ambiguity and tension in the field regarding the nature of literacy. The adult literacy curriculum is obviously far less standardized than that in K-12 classrooms, and the purposes and tasks of adult literacy are also less well defined. Thus, inquiry into staff development, beliefs about teaching and learning, curriculum content, and decision making about it, retention, and evaluation—to name a few inquiry project topics—are program and classroom issues rooted in questions about the nature of literacy itself.

The concern of practitioners with power relationships grows out of shifting and sometimes contradictory images of adult literacy learners as they are portrayed in the popular media and in the research literature on adult learners (Lytle, 1991). The images of adult learners range from helpless, nonfunctioning, dependent,

and deficient (Fingeret, 1989; Kazemek, 1988) to competent, interdependent, productive, and creative (Fingeret, 1983, 1989; Reder, 1987). There is considerable evidence now to suggest that the latter view matches far better with the reality of adults who come to programs. A view of adult learners that assumes competence and ability raises many questions about the roles that adults can and should play in planning and implementing instruction at both the classroom and program levels.

However, valuing participation in programs by adult learners can create tensions and concerns for practitioners as they struggle to answer questions about sharing power, co-creating the curriculum, and putting learners at the center of decision making. Many of the projects dealt explicitly or implicitly with learner-centered and power-related questions. More specifically, they reflect some of the critical tensions inherent in the notion of learner-centered approaches. For example, practitioners struggled with the contradictions inherent in an instructional approach that invites learners to make decisions to direct their own learning when they have neither asked for nor necessarily want to have this level of control. Many of the projects raised questions about who really makes decisions, under what circumstances, and why. These concerns reflect conflict within the field over whether and how traditional schooling models and teaching fit adult literacy learners. The projects as a set showed that the meanings of teaching, learning, and administering in adult education and the roles of those involved are complex, problematic, and unresolved. Although the inquiry projects did not seek to arrive at definitive answers, the questions, concerns, and issues that they address speak to important issues in the field.

Sources of Practitioner Research Questions

Practitioner research questions reflect dissonances created by complex interactions among factors related to the practitioner's professional philosophy and role, the program and Seminar contexts, the policy climate in the wider field, and the demands of daily practice.

These data suggest three dimensions of professional life that interact and, in various combinations, create tension or dissonance for practitioners. These dimensions are (a) *person* (a person's professional philosophy and role), (b) *context* (the program and Seminar contexts and the wider field of adult literacy that make up the professional setting), and (c) *practice* (a person's practice which relates recursively to [a] and [b]). In the following sections, we define the range and variation of these dimensions,

describe several different aspects of dissonance, and then provide three examples of the ways in which these dimensions bump up against each other to create dissonance for practitioners. These frictions or discomforts contribute to the formulation of inquiry questions.

THREE DIMENSIONS OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE

Person

The practitioner's professional stance or theory of practice is one dimension that may create dissonance leading to a research question. This identity is defined in terms of *professional philosophy* and *program role*. We learned about practitioners' explicitly stated philosophies through initial interviews upon entry into the Seminar, as well as through the ideas, concerns, and questions that they shared with the group as we discussed current research literature and each other's practice. Although practitioners do not always name and articulate their philosophies, their general orientations to practice can often be inferred from choices of materials, styles of instruction and interaction with learners, and assessment procedures. These general orientations imply assumptions about the nature of literacy, teaching and learning, and adult learners. A professional philosophy is also expressed by how practitioners position themselves in relation to participation in the larger field. These positions are indicated by such things as an individual's level of interest in (a) taking on leadership roles in their own programs or in local and national organizations and (b) working to affect policy decisions made by funders.

Practitioners' roles in their own programs can also contribute to a sense of dissonance. Unlike K-12 education, where a practitioner functions as a teacher or an administrator, adult literacy professionals often wear multiple hats. Practitioners in ALPIP fulfilled a wide range of roles in their programs. While some worked exclusively as teachers, tutors, or administrators, most did both administrative and instructional work. Many teachers and tutors also had responsibilities to develop new curricula or to manage other special projects within their programs. Some practitioners worked at more than one program to create a full-time job, while others simply worked part time. The amount of professional experience and prior educational training contributes to the practitioners' stances in their programs (Lytle et al., 1992).

Contexts

We define *professional setting* or *context* for ALPIP participants in terms of their program's philosophy, the Seminar philosophy, and the wider field of adult literacy education as promulgated by policymakers and funders. Program philosophies ranged from individualistic one-to-one tutoring programs to those that placed a strong emphasis on participatory and learner-centered approaches. Although none of the programs were school based, some were affiliated with other social service organizations. Most programs describe themselves as community based. Program philosophy can also be expressed in terms of services offered. While some programs only provide literacy instruction, others offer a range of services from child care to counseling. Programs pattern themselves, to a lesser or greater extent, on K-12 models, use a variety of instructional materials, and have varying missions. All of these differences in program features reflect implicit, if not explicit, views of adults as learners and of the nature of literacy, which may be a source of dissonance if program philosophy and professional philosophy are not congruent.

The Seminar itself also functioned as a source of conflict or dissonance for some participants. The underlying philosophy of the Seminar supports a view of literacy as practice and critical reflection and subsumes the notions of skills and tasks. Its approach to learning by both adult literacy educators and learners is participatory and learner centered. By virtue of the fact that learning in the Seminar is inquiry centered, it is assumed that practitioners are both knowers and generators of knowledge. The facilitators attempted to enact this philosophy through invitations to co-construct the curriculum; to engage in critical reading, writing, and discussion on current research literature in the field; and to build structures that support participants in initiating inquiry projects for which their classes and programs become the sites of inquiry.

One important way in which participants' professional settings are shaped is through pressure brought to bear by funders and policymakers. Most programs represented in ALPIP receive funding through the Pennsylvania State Department of Education or through the Private Industry Council (PIC), Philadelphia's conduit for Job Training Partnership Act monies. Although these funders do not currently mandate standardized curriculum or set credentialing requirements for practitioners, they do exert a great deal of influence. For example, in the last few years, both the state department of education and PIC have begun to require that grantees use standardized tests. Funders are beginning to tie

continued funding to improved tests scores. While not directly mandating curriculum, this link encourages programs to teach to the test—thus indirectly mandating the curriculum.

Practice

Practice is shaped by all of the above dimensions and contexts. It is informed by (a) the role a practitioner decides to play with learners or staff, (b) decisions about curriculum content and instructional methods (in the case of teachers and tutors) or program improvements (in the case of administrators), and (c) decisions about learner assessment or program evaluation. These decisions, in turn, are informed by the practitioners' interpretive frameworks for adult literacy learning and are a result of personal interests and prior experiences. Some orientations are more likely to provide a context for problematizing practice than others; the use of materials and curricula that rigidly prescribe teachers' roles, for example, leaves less room for the infusion of professional philosophy and appears to constrain the possibilities for decision making on the part of the practitioner.

ASPECTS OF DISSONANCE

For the practitioners in ALPIP, interactions among these factors of person, context and practice led to two sorts of dissonance. The first type is called *mismatches,* and the second *felt needs*. Mismatches grow out of conflicts or differences between personal and program philosophy, or between program philosophy and funding policy. Often these differences are buttressed by overlapping and conflicting views of literacy, learning, and adults as learners. Felt needs is a kind of dissonance that grows out of a gap between something the practitioner has and something the practitioner wants, between what is going on and what is intended or envisioned. These felt needs appear as (a) identifiable problems in practice (e.g., retention of students); (b) an uncomfortable disjuncture or contradiction between one's own philosophy and practice (e.g., having a participatory philosophy and being highly directive in teaching); or (c) an interest in making familiar routines, interactions, and methods strange in order to understand more about what is really going on in classrooms and programs (e.g., what happens when learners work in small writing groups). This latter type of dissonance often grows out of a curiosity about implicit assumptions and beliefs that might remain hidden.

To understand the ways factors in professional life interact with each other to create dissonance, we provide three case study examples of practitioners' inquiry questions and highlight the factors in each case that seem to be the primary sources of

dissonance. In each case, the dissonance was created by a different combination of factors. We found that for each practitioner, some factors were of more importance than others, but the data suggest that all of the factors figure in some way in the creation of dissonance.

Example 1: The first example is of an administrator whose question grew out of a mismatch between (a) her own professional philosophy and her program philosophy, which are congruent, and (b) the pressure she feels from funders, which is the source of friction. At the same time, the specifics of her project are in response to a felt need—she feels a potential gap between the program's philosophy and its staff development practices.

Peggy McGuire is the founder and executive director of her program, and therefore, she has been able to shape a program philosophy that fits closely with her own. Committed to learner-centered and participatory education, McGuire's goal is to facilitate the creation of a learning situation that will be truly empowering to everyone involved: learners, staff, volunteers, and board members. In the text of her inquiry project, she defines her role as executive director, however, as being responsible for assuring that the program is accountable not only to participants but also to "funders who keep us going and the policymakers whose policies affect funding decisions" (p. 1). It is here that McGuire reveals her sense of a mismatch. She makes it clear that being accountable to program participants as well as funders and policymakers is not always a simple task. She explains:

> *Part of my job is to develop program guidelines which strike a balance between two (sometimes conflicting, and always dynamic) sets of expectations about what constitutes effective adult basic/literacy education practice. (p.1)*

Her project, which focuses on designing a staff development plan for her program, seeks to create just such a balance. Expressing a desire to make the practice of staff development as congruent as possible with program philosophy, she sees a potential gap and chooses, through the implementation of her inquiry project, to work to bridge the distance. She asks:

> *What should staff development look like in GWEP? The longer version of that question, given the philosophical and environmental context...is this: If we are trying to be an authentically community-based, participatory and empowering educational*

effort in all aspects of GWEP, then what constitutes staff development for us, and what is the connection between it and overall organizational development? (pp. 3-4)

McGuire poses this question because new federal money is being made available to states through the federal Adult Education Act of 1991. This act mandates that states spend a designated portion of their federal allocation on developing "principles and standards for effective adult education programs, and use those guidelines to evaluate performance of federally funded efforts" (pp. 1-2). For McGuire, this mandate makes it an especially appropriate time to devote energy to "improving our learner-centered, community-based practice; and then, to challenge state and federal policymakers to seriously consider our experience and expertise as they develop indicators of effective adult education programs" (p. 2). She identifies staff development as a crucially necessary area for improved practice and seems to imply that she hopes to use what she learns from her project to participate in the state and national debates on this topic.

Example 2: The second example is of a teacher whose question is expressed both in terms of mismatch and felt need. For Sandy Harrill, a mismatch was created through interaction in the Seminar and her role as a quasi-new teacher. Although Harrill was not new to the field, she had been doing administrative work at another agency until two months into the Seminar, when she switched programs and started teaching two classes.

Harrill clearly articulated the ways in which ALPIP contributed to a sense of dissonance between her own professional philosophy, which developed in part through her graduate training in secondary education, and what she was experiencing in the classroom. She writes in her midyear portfolio reflection:

The Seminar has made me more critical of my own practice, more apt to make my assumptions about teaching and learning explicit and conscious. If I had not been in this Seminar I believe that I would be much less uncertain about my teaching. I don't see my uncertainty as a drawback, but rather as a stage of my growth and development....Essentially, the Seminar has caused me to question almost everything I do in the classroom. It is a wonderfully terrible place to be. (p. 1)

Harrill finds herself in this uncertain place because of the juxtaposition of her new job, the Seminar, and her return to teaching which made "this place" very different from what she expected based on her previous graduate education. She explained that her training "drilled [her] in a model of teaching that was supposed to work all the time" (p. 1). Harrill tries to find a question that would help sanction and ameliorate her discomfort. She writes:

> *The furious pace of job change was matched by the pace of intellectual change that I was going through as a result of ALPIP. I was discovering new methods of improving my own practice; methods which differed wildly from those that I was taught in graduate school. I had thought at the beginning of the ALPIP year that one of the things I had to offer [the group] was the graduate school educational philosophy in which I had been drilled. Although I was skeptical and reluctant the ALPIP inquiry methods that I first thought were "flaky" and "politically correct" began to revolutionize my teaching practice. I came to find these inquiry methods deeply empowering; the validation of my experience and knowledge and learning tools that I could use to explore my own questions was a professional metamorphosis. My vocabulary is not large enough to express the significance of the change. (p. 2)*

In this passage Harrill refers to "flaky" and "politically correct" inquiry methods by which she means qualitative research methods. She feels skeptical of them because they were incongruent with her preservice training, which emphasized a technical and mechanistic approach to teaching in which the teacher is positioned as expert imparter of knowledge. Harrill's inquiry question, however, is based on a very different view of teacher. She explained that the premise of her question emerged from a belief that she was learning from her students and wanted to understand more about what this really meant. She writes, "I was interested in this question because I was consumed with anxiety about my teaching....I felt confused and distraught most of the time" (p. 3). Harrill, feeling overwhelmed, was seeking a project that would help give her a better sense of who was learning what, from whom, and how in her class. After quite a bit of turmoil over what her question really was, she articulates it as, "I want to know what and how I learn about teaching from my learners" (p. 5). She reports that once she discovered what her

question was and used that to focus her energy, "suddenly I wasn't a mess anymore" (p. 5).

Example 3: The third example focuses on Martha Merson, who is a teacher and curriculum developer. By acting in these dual roles she identifies a gap between program philosophy and practice. Her program is considered a leader in the field as an innovator in assessment and tutor training. Its philosophy is to offer goal-related reading, writing, and math curriculum using a whole language and learner-centered approach. The program is contracted to teach some classes with a specific curriculum. These are typically job readiness, job training, or workplace literacy classes. For the most part, however, the program's curriculum is unspecified for the majority of its classes and for all of its one-to-one tutoring pairs. Tutors and teachers are encouraged to follow learners' needs and interests.

Although Merson also subscribes to this philosophy, she raises questions for her inquiry project about some of the contradictions inherent in learner-centered practice and about the appropriateness of following exclusively the interests of the learner. She explains her dilemma in this way:

> *I felt dissatisfied with the general mission of improving reading and writing and the specific charge to teach reading and writing using student goals. When I practice learner-centered instruction the emphasis is on taking the lead from the students, which means teachers and tutors like me ought to put aside our thoughts about what it is important for a student to know. Instead we work from the learners' interests and goals....I set out to explore in theory and practice some of the issues surrounding content specific teaching. (p. 1)*

By choosing to focus on curriculum, Merson is attempting to wear the two hats of teacher and curriculum developer and raising critical questions about the purposes of literacy and the inherent contradictions in learner-centered instruction. On the one hand, she feels that adults should direct their own learning, but on the other, she worries that their choices might be limited by their own experiences. She wonders what role a teacher's own interests, background, and beliefs about literacy should play in decisions about the curriculum.

Merson uses the idea of cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1987) as a way to discuss the question named in the subtitle of Hirsch's book—

Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and as a jumping off point for a conceptual inquiry into what she as a teacher should be teaching adult learners. She feels that part of her job as a teacher is to help learners "become better-versed in the (albeit fluid) body of knowledge that would ensure their participation as equals in conversations or as readers on a range of topics" (p. 1). She suggests that without specific kinds of mainstream knowledge about politics, government, history, geography, and culture adult literacy learners may have to bluff their understanding of conversations at work and in the community and will have a limited understanding of many newspaper and magazine articles. Merson explains that the kind of knowledge, which she calls content-specific, "would facilitate comprehension of texts produced for a white male readership by building a reader's background knowledge, but would not necessarily invalidate knowledge about other cultures' poets, history, and accomplishments....I am in no way calling for the subordination of multicultural knowledge" (p. 5). With this approach, Merson is trying to find a way to be both learner centered and to teach something about what she believes every American needs and has a right to know.

The question Merson raises makes explicit that there can be a mismatch between personal and program philosophy and practice when she attempts to follow the learners, as well as to value her own instincts as a teacher about what she should be teaching. Her project is an attempt to mediate the gap between these two positions. It also raises questions about practice as she wonders how to give learners access to knowledge that will give them more cultural literacy and a greater ability to read critically. Merson is free to raise such questions about her own practice, in part, because she teaches in a program that does not mandate a specific curriculum. These questions involve the content of the curriculum, techniques for making particular reading material accessible to readers with a wide range of abilities, and objectives of literacy programs. It is this very freedom that creates dissonance for Merson.

Not every member of the ALPIP Seminar, however, readily identified a question. One participant, Germaine Branch, did not seem to have a question that was particularly burning or emerging from some felt dissonance in her work. From her long career as an elementary public school teacher, she brought clear interpretative frameworks and expectations that guided her work. In her paper, she does not write that she had a question when she describes initiation of her project. Instead she writes:

> *During one of our conferences, Marci asked if I had any suggestions for a writing activity that she could use with her students. I had read several of the Seminar papers on the dialogue journal and shared them with her. We discussed using the journals with her students and she felt that she could involve her students in the activity. (p. 2)*

Later, she states that when she read the journals she was "curious to see what skills needed instruction" (p. 3). Although this was her interest at the time, this statement does not appear to reflect a particular research question. At the suggestion of one of the teachers facilitating the Seminar, Branch begins a dialogue with the teacher, Marci, and says that she "found that this was a good way to give Marci support without seeming to pry into her teaching" (p. 3). Branch was extremely interested in and committed to the students and to her new role as supervisor, and her inquiry project hovered between these two levels. Her primary intention seemed to be to support her colleagues' efforts and to find out what worked rather than to identify mismatches or gaps that might lead her to adopt an inquiry stance toward her own practice.

We have presented only three examples of the ways in which factors in professional life interact to create various kinds of dissonance. In every case, however, ALPIP practitioners developed inquiry questions that would in some way help them mediate their own particular combination of tensions, either by making them explicit and known, bringing focus, offering a set of strategies for dealing with them, or providing opportunities to try new things. It is perhaps the nature of any creative profession such as teaching to face moments of dissonance, expressed as uncertainty, curiosity, tension, need, and desire for change. Capturing those moments and turning them into inquiry questions provides practitioners with an empowering way to learn and develop in their fields.

The Nature of Practitioner Research Questions

Practitioner inquiries address interpretative questions that not only reflect their distinctive contexts and their immediate, consequential relationships to particular learners and programs, but they also speak to the concerns of multiple audiences in the field.

An analysis of the content and type of questions posed demonstrates that practitioners' research questions are relevant to both local and more public audiences (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992). Practitioner-researchers are obviously their own first

audience. As we have shown above, inquiry projects grow out of specific contexts and practice, and those who are doing them define their foremost purpose as helping practitioners themselves teach or administer better. Through their research, practitioners come to know their own knowledge and field experience more deeply and in new ways.

The deeply contextualized questions raised in practitioner research can, however, speak to the concerns of fellow participants in local practitioner research communities. Through a year-long process of dialogue and exchange about readings in adult literacy education and related issues in their practice, and through the development of research questions and the eventual sharing of data, practitioners build knowledge together. This community is an important audience for all stages of the research project, from inception, through data collection and analysis, to writing and dissemination. (The third technical report on the ALPIP project will focus on a case study of the community and its implications for staff development curriculum.)

If one envisions the possible audiences for practitioner research as concentric circles, with the practitioner-researcher as the innermost circle, and the research community as the next circle, the outermost circle would encompass the varied public audiences for practitioner research. These public audiences include other adult literacy administrators and teachers, university-based teachers and researchers, policymakers, and funders. In the following examples, we show the ways that practitioners' questions reflect particular contexts and relate to the concerns of the wider community of practitioners, university-based researchers, policymakers, and funders.

Example 1: As indicated in the previous section, practitioners' research questions grow out of dissonance stemming from the complex interaction of a range of factors. Such was the case with Pat Haff, a curriculum developer at a community-based literacy and job readiness program for women. Her program emphasizes participatory, learner-centered pedagogy and is restructuring its administration in order to become more participatory. At the time when she was in the process of identifying her research question, the agency was working on how to involve learners in program management and decision making and how best to develop learner leadership in the agency. Philosophically, Haff also had a strong belief in the importance of making the agency and the classroom as participatory as possible and in facilitating learner leadership. She writes:

> *Because [the program] is in the middle of this restructuring process, it seemed to be a particularly timely and useful area for my research. As I began to think about the possible areas for exploring learner leadership development, I realized that I might be assuming some definitions of learner leadership that others in the agency may not share and that this would be a good place to start. (p. 2)*

Haff wanted her questions to inform her and her program about issues vital to the life of the program. Her question was: "What is learner leadership at [my program]?" (p. 2). Later, she expanded the question to include: How has learner leadership looked in the past? How could it look in the future? Haff's questions were very much rooted in the state of practice in her program, in her professional philosophy, in the program's philosophy, and in a desire to facilitate the process of change in which the agency was involved. She hoped that gaining a deeper and richer understanding of learner leadership would help to facilitate that process. This deeper understanding has the potential to give Haff more insight into her own interpretive framework for learner leadership, into the frameworks of others, including learners, teachers and administrators, and, ultimately, into the program's assumptions and actions regarding the issue.

Embedded in Haff's specific questions, however, are a number of more general questions that reflect her project's relevance to her local practitioner research community. The more general question about learner leadership embraces questions such as: (a) What difference does it make for learners to be involved in leadership roles in adult literacy programs? (b) What is the relationship between leadership experience and learners' ability to meet their literacy and other goals? (c) How can learners be more involved in a variety of aspects of adult literacy programs? and (d) What are some of the challenges in involving learners in leadership roles? While other programs and those who staff them will be working in other contexts (e.g., they are not in the midst of a restructuring process), many literacy programs and practitioners in the Seminar struggle with questions about learner leadership and how to make programs more participatory. Throughout the year, the topic of learner-centeredness ran through the ALPIP Seminar. Participants reflected on the meaning of the term—in theory and in practice—and on the tensions and possibilities of learner-centered approaches. Learner involvement in decision making in the classroom and the program was discussed. Haff's project contributed to that ongoing conversation and provided

another opportunity for learning in the mutually educative process of the Seminar.

In the domain of public knowledge and, more specifically, academic research, there is a paucity of research on adult literacy in general. The existing body of research on participatory literacy education is also small and there is a scarcity of models for programs to follow (Fingeret & Danin, 1991; Jurmo, 1989). As Jurmo states, "Participatory theory and practice remain scattered and isolated across the literacy field" (p. 81). We know little about how such programs work. Haff's project, and others like it, have the potential to make a contribution in this underresearched area. Similarly, policymakers, funders, and program teachers and administrators could also learn from this research. Although their concerns would likely be different from those of academic researchers, they, too, could benefit from access to investigations into questions of participatory practice.

Example 2: A second example concerns Jean Fleschute, a European American teacher and administrator, who asked: "What happens when I use African American literature as the focus for lessons with three classes, each one culturally diverse from the others?" (p. 1). When Fleschute asked this question, she was working with three different classes: One was all African American, another largely European American, and the third about half African American and half Latino. Each of the three classes, and the three different inner city neighborhoods in which they were located, had "its own distinctive culture" (p. 1). When the African American class requested to use African American literature as the focus of the curriculum, Fleschute was "curious to know what would occur if I did the same in the classes in the other two neighborhoods" (p. 2). In addition to the practice-related impetus for the project (the class's request), elements of Fleschute's previous experience and philosophy also made it an interesting project for her. "This was exciting to me as I enjoy Black literature and so looked forward to the opportunity to read works unfamiliar to me and to read, discuss, and explore with my learners pieces that I had already read and enjoyed" (p. 1). Weaving together these various aspects of practice, philosophy, and experience led Fleschute to raise a number of other questions:

> *How would my white students...react to my bringing in stories of Black culture and having discussions which would look at both the universal and also the cultural issues that would come out of the stories? What would my students learn about others, themselves, their beliefs? For my white*

> *learners, would reading and discussing this literature do anything toward dismantling stereotypes and racism? Would learners see themselves and their own issues and problems in the stories? How would my mixed race class...react? How would my black students react to my trying to facilitate discussions about their culture? (p. 2)*

Fleschute's intimate knowledge of these three classes and their contexts enabled her to pose a number of *emic,* or insider, questions about the different classes. Fleschute already has a strong sense of some of the differences between her classes and the learners in them, as well as of some of their interactions with literature. This research could enable her to expand her knowledge in order to understand more deeply some of the implications of race, culture, and response to texts in the classroom, as well as student-teacher and student-student dynamics.

Embedded in Fleschute's specific question are a number of other questions, including: (a) In what ways does using various texts for instruction influence reader response? (b) In what ways do learners' cultures influence their responses to various kinds of literature? (c) Of what importance is race in classroom interactions? and (d) In what ways are learners diverse? Members of her local practitioner research community come from contexts different than Fleschute's; no one's teaching or program situation mirrors the particular ethnic and racial make-up of her three classes. Yet, her questions relate to issues about which many practitioners in the group wonder, including the role and impact of culture and what it means when the teacher is of a different race than the learners. Fleschute's project is relevant to the two themes that run through many of the projects: the nature of literacy and issues of power and role. In addition, her project raises questions about the nature of the curriculum, a subject raised in many readings and Seminar discussions. Participants discussed what the content of the curriculum should be and what co-construction of the curriculum should look like. Questions about race, class, and gender also ran through the group's consideration of many of these topics. Fleschute's project has the potential to contribute to a number of continuing conversations in the Seminar and to the knowledge-building process of the group and individuals within it. Although both Fleschute's and Haff's questions are specific and local, they also immediately thrust the practitioner-researchers into a wider conversation and enable them to generate knowledge useful to the wider community.

Lastly, Fleschute's questions relate to topics in the domain of public knowledge. Work like Fleschute's can lead to new directions for research in adult literacy education. Despite the pervasive use of literature in adult literacy programs and the racial and ethnic diversity of teachers and learners, there has been little exploration of what occurs when groups of adults read together. Fleschute's questions touch on issues such as reader response, teaching of culturally relevant texts, and multicultural literature and literacy. Adults' responses to literature have been little studied, particularly when the adults are low income and/or people of color and the literature is nonmainstream, such as that written by African American authors. Studies like Fleschute's have the potential to broaden the fields of reader response and multicultural literacy because of the identity of the study participants and the kind of literature used. Her research is grounded in her vantage point as a teacher in three different, particular contexts. This unique vantage point enables her work to make a different kind of contribution to these fields than research implemented by university-based researchers. Her research could give a contextualized view of how issues of race and multiculturalism are played out in the classroom that would be of interest to funders, policymakers, and other practitioners.

Generic solutions to problems in adult literacy are inadequate for the range of contexts and constraints; therefore, rethinking practitioners' relationships to knowledge generation and use is critical. Practitioner research enfranchises teachers, tutors, and administrators as knowledge makers. The questions posed in this set of inquiry projects are at once unique and somewhat universal; their processes and outcomes (to be reported in the third technical report in this series) can stimulate a deeper and more widespread dialogue among practitioners, researchers, and policymakers in the field. This dialogue problematizes the notion of a knowledge base for practice by bringing practitioners into the conversation about what counts as knowledge in the field.

Rather than focusing on the technical aspects of being a teacher or administrator, the questions posed by practitioners in the ALPIP project (see Table 1) raise issues about the critical and epistemological aspects of practice. As explained above, several projects directly address issues related to race, class, and gender, while others implicitly interrogate current practices related to difference and diversity by virtue of the topic selected for inquiry. All of the practitioners involved seemed to be seeking to alter some aspect of the existing structures and power relationships by examining such issues as (a) what texts are taught; (b) how teachers,

administrators, and learners share power; and (c) the extent to which program management and leadership represent participatory processes. Most of the participants brought some knowledge of participatory, learner-centered, and critical perspectives to the Seminar from its inception.

In the group discussions and the designs for inquiry projects that emerged, participants took a critical stance. They questioned common practice, deliberated about what they regarded as expert knowledge, and examined the underlying assumptions, arrangements, and structures of adult literacy education in order to understand their sources and impacts. Each of their individual projects has the potential to stimulate some form of systemic change, first through its implementation and dissemination on site and then through the Seminar as a research community. The participants' collective work (to be presented in subsequent reports) suggests that they regarded educational problems and issues not solely as individual matters but also as social and political matters that may require, at some time, a form of collective action.

Relationship of Research Design to Practice

Practitioners select research methods that are congruent with, and that often intensify or extend, their day-to-day activities as teachers, tutors, and administrators.

Practitioners' research methods reveal distinctive ways of wedding research processes to practice. Practitioner-researchers are situated differently in relation to the field than are university-based researchers. Their research, therefore, is always intimately connected with and generally reflexively related to practice. As was described above, practitioners' research questions grow from interaction between their professional and program philosophies and the contexts and issues in practice. Practitioners' research methods are distinctive because the methods can, in effect, become practice and vice versa; research and practice stand in a reciprocal, recursive, and mutually informing relationship. Research methodology becomes not simply an add-on or an extraneous project superimposed on already large workloads, but it becomes embedded in teaching and administering.

Types of Data

In the ALPIP group, practitioners systematically collected various types of information in ways characteristic of qualitative

research: document review, interviews, and observation with fieldnotes and audio/videotapes.

Documents

Documents were used to gather data about topics such as policy, student performance, and student-teacher interactions. These documents fell into three main categories. When practitioners reviewed documents, some chose to first ground themselves in an outsider view of topics that they were investigating. For example, they read state reports and academic papers on staff development in adult literacy education or reviewed literature such as E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* for an essay on the content of adult literacy curriculum. The practitioners then analyzed their own experiences and gathered data from other adult literacy educators in order to see the tensions and resonances between outsider and insider perspectives.

Most of the other documents reviewed, including student writing, a formal reading assessment, and other class materials, were actually created in the classroom or used there. In the third category of documents, the researchers themselves actually created the documents, either alone or with learners. These included teacher journals, teacher plans, and teacher-learner dialogue journals.

Interviews

Practitioners used interviews, both individual and focus group, to gather data on the perspectives, knowledge, and experiences of teachers, administrators, and learners in adult literacy education. The researchers' positions as insiders also affected researcher-researched relationships in this kind of data gathering. While one practitioner interviewed teachers around the city and country, most of the other researchers focused on people involved in their own literacy programs. The scope of perspectives sought was determined by the research question.

Martha Merson, whose question dealt with the content of the adult literacy curriculum across programs, interviewed the broadest spectrum, which included a number of teachers from various cities. Her conversations with other teachers were shaped by the fact that they were talking as colleagues, rather than as university expert and teacher in the field. As a teacher, Merson shared many of their concerns and questions. These, in fact, motivated her study. Peggy McGuire, who wanted to explore what staff development should look like at her agency, used a questionnaire, group discussion, and

subsequent individual interviews to gather data from all of the staff members at her program. The group reflected on the data in initial and follow-up meetings, generating knowledge that the executive director-researcher worked with and then brought back to them for further input. Jean Fleschute, whose question dealt with what would happen when she used African American literature in three ethnically different classes, planned lessons focused on African American literature. She then documented the discussion of the texts and collected learners' writing generated in response to the texts. Fleschute involved the students as knowers in the research project by involving them in some of the initial analysis and coding of data. The array of methods employed by practitioners included individual interviews with other staff, tutors, and learners, focus groups, a questionnaire, and a survey.

Observations

The third method employed by practitioners involved observations to gather data on the nature of teaching and learning. Teachers and tutors, focusing their observations within the context of their research questions, observed tutoring sessions, writing workshops, reading and discussion of texts, and ongoing teacher-learner interaction. Practitioners documented observations and interviews by taking fieldnotes and sometimes by using audiotapes. In one case, videotapes were used. Joan Prior, who tutored a deaf adult learner, studied 10 individual tutoring sessions with the learner. She videotaped seven of the sessions, focusing her observations on miscommunications between hearing tutor and deaf learner and on the use of the learning experience approach with a deaf adult who must translate back and forth between two languages (American Sign Language and written English). As part of a project focused on involving current learners with the student retention problem, Janet Sigler observed and took notes on class discussions on this issue and on learners' involvement in planning and implementing activities meant to re-involve students who had already left the program.

DOCUMENTATION IN PRACTICE

Practitioner-researchers do not, and perhaps cannot, separate research from practice. ALPIP participants incorporated data collection into their practice in different ways. Sometimes they examined an existing class or program activity more closely by documenting particular aspects of practice. Sandy Harrill, for example, did not introduce any dramatic innovations; she simply observed learners' responses in a more systematic and intentional way. More often, inquiry projects provided an impetus for

practitioners to try something new using existing class or program structures. For example, Marie Knibbe and Daryl Gordon introduced a new kind of writing workshop into their classrooms. Richard Drucker used his existing initial interviews with tutors to learn about tutor beliefs. Peggy McGuire used the structure of the annual staff retreat to facilitate group reflection on her research topic. Research took place during class or as part of regularly scheduled meetings or events. Another way of braiding together research and practice involved introducing new formats that were not part of the regular program or class routines, such as focus groups or dialogue journals between teacher and administrator. These new formats always grew out of existing program issues or staff and learner concerns, thus representing insider perspectives and offering the possibility of providing information or insight needed by program participants. The following brief descriptions further illustrate practitioners' systematic and intentional research methodologies.

Example 1: Richard Drucker's questions grew out of his experiences working with tutors. An important part of the process of orienting tutors and matching them with students at his program involves an initial interview between the tutor and the coordinator (Drucker). During these interviews, he observed "a wide range of responses from tutors concerning their beliefs about how adults learn, about what strategies learners use to develop reading skills, and about what activities would help adult learners develop successful reading behaviors" (p. 1). Drucker posed the questions: "What are tutors' beliefs about learning and learning to read? How might these beliefs influence the ways they teach reading, interact with learners, and accomplish their goals?" (p. 1).

Drucker notes that his research interest and the interview he developed grew, in part, out of readings in the ALPIP Seminar on topics such as participatory education, teaching English language arts, curriculum and instruction, and teacher inquiry (Bloome, 1985; Fingeret, 1989, Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1991). In particular, reading and discussion emphasized the importance of making the beliefs of teachers, tutors, and learners about literacy, teaching, and learning explicit, and they presented a conceptual framework for assessing literacy development that included beliefs, practices, processes, plans, and goals (Lytle,1991). Convinced of the importance for his work of a deeper understanding of the beliefs that tutors bring with them, Drucker identified the areas he wanted the interviews to address: "tutors' expectations about who their learners were, tutors' beliefs about teaching learners to read...[and] tutors' own literacy practices" (p. 5). He then formulated specific

questions that corresponded to these areas and performed 20 interviews with tutors over a period of several months, recording responses in a log. An ongoing and central aspect of his practice also became the tool for data gathering. Drucker hoped that learning more about tutors' beliefs would inform his thinking about matching tutors and learners as well as about his work as a resource for such pairs and for small learning groups.

In the course of his research, Drucker found that tutors were more comfortable when he described his project as an intensification of practice than when he used words like research and data. He writes:

> *The most difficult aspect of introducing inquiry-based research into my program involved data collection. When I mentioned to a tutor that I was collecting data for my research, he made a face. I decided to mention this event in my dialogue journal with a co-member of the ALPIP Seminar. She suggested that I avoid the terms data and research and focus on the fact that I was trying to collect information from tutors so that I could learn more about how the program works: what questions tutors might have about their learners, which strategies they would use in tutoring and which ones they would avoid, so that I could improve the overall program. This procedure seemed to work very well; I explained the kind of information I was interested in and what I might do with it. When new tutors gained a sense that I was asking questions so that a specific outcome might take place, the interviews became less tense. (p. 2)*

When Drucker, whom tutors were just getting to know, seemed like the researcher and, by extension, tutors perceived themselves as subjects, interviews seemed stilted and strained. By explicitly positioning himself as a practitioner who was seeking to learn more in order to make the program work better, he was able to change significantly the tone of the interviews. This restatement of his own role repositioned the tutors, who moved from subjects to participants, and also shifted the roles of researcher and researched. In the course of his research, Drucker sharpened the focus of his already existing practice of conducting interviews, extended it into new areas, and included systematic data collection.

Many adult literacy programs offer one-on-one tutoring with volunteer tutors, and Drucker's research is linked to concerns within that subfield of literacy. Practitioners and researchers debate what constitutes a good match, and how coordinators like Drucker can use their information to create tutor-learner pairs that will help learners reach their goals and tutors stay involved. Another relevant debate involves the importance of beliefs about reading and writing as well as teaching and learning in the match process. Should tutors and learners have the same beliefs? What happens when tutors' beliefs are in conflict with the ideology of the tutoring program where they have volunteered? Drucker's research provides an emic view of how these issues play themselves out in one particular program.

Example 2: Marie Knibbe is a teacher at a community-based GED program for women. She describes how her practice, her own beliefs and questions, and her program philosophy intertwined in the process of identifying her question:

> *Part of my interest in this question arose from a perceived need in that I felt there was not enough focus on writing in my class to help the group meet their goals. This concern was coupled with wondering how best to balance and integrate traditional writing expectations (e.g., how to write an essay for the GED exam) with writing as a means of self expression and critical reflection. I also felt that while other aspects of our class were a collaborative endeavor, writing still seemed to be the area where I remained clearly the teacher and the students remained clearly the students. Lastly, my interest also stemmed from previous experience indicating that opportunities for sharing and response had a positive impact on group dynamics and individual self-esteem...In the context in which this question arose there is a great priority placed on participatory learning and concern for individual goals and interests. (p. 1)*

Knibbe raises a number of concerns about teaching writing because of her philosophy, her program context, and the learners with whom she works. These concerns include balancing various kinds of goals for writing (e.g., traditional/GED writing instruction and writing as self-expression and critical reflection); questions of control, role, and power; and effects of collaboration and sharing on the group and on individuals. Thus, Knibbe's question became "What happens when I facilitate collaborative writing workshops in

my class?" (p. 1). This question was intimately connected to her philosophy, her program's philosophy, and gaps or tensions that she saw between those philosophies and her practice.

Knibbe's research and practice stood in a reciprocal and recursive relationship. By facilitating a discussion of good writing, she in effect enlisted her students in pursuing one of the subquestions of her research. Existing class components, such as learner-teacher dialogue journals, and new ones, such as writing workshops and reflection on the workshops, were important sites of data collection, and they also constituted the work of the class during that period. In her pedagogy, Knibbe sought to change traditional teacher-learner relationships and to position the learners as knowers (e.g., she did not want to be the sole or main writing critic, and she created opportunities for learners to critique each other's writing). Knibbe sought similar ends in her research, which fit her pedagogy. In her research, she tried not to re-enact traditional researcher-researched relationships and again saw the learners as knowledge builders.

Artifacts in Knibbe's data included audiotapes and transcripts, notes on newsprint from group discussions, learners' journals and written responses, and teacher's notes and journal. Again, the intimate connection between research and practice is clear: All of the artifacts of research were also the material of instruction. Knibbe's research was embedded in existing concerns of both teacher and program. It represented an intensification of her work in that she drew on existing practices in new and systematic ways. It also represented an extension of her work in that it led to innovations (such as the various forms of the writing workshop) as she attempted to explore collaborative writing with her class.

As with the other practitioner research projects examined, Knibbe's work clearly relates to ongoing conversations in the larger field. Practitioners and researchers discuss and research how best to teach writing and composition. Those who value participatory and learner-centered philosophies explore how to teach writing in a way that draws on and respects what learners bring with them and that does not simply re-inscribe traditional teacher-learner power relations. Another ongoing debate within the field examines how to integrate preparing students for the GED and other similar exams with teaching different kinds of writing and giving students the tools to go on to other settings (e.g., work, training programs, and college). Knibbe's study outlines how one particular community of teacher and learners struggled with some of these issues; other studies of similar issues by practitioners could further extend the dialogue.

For one participant, however, research was not well integrated into practice, and, in fact, it began to seem an impediment to her practice. Lore Rosenthal, a teacher of deaf adults, points out that perhaps the context of her work made her research especially challenging. She writes:

> *These new ideas (from the Seminar and about involving learners in directing their own learning process and about self-assessment and informal assessment) were very exciting but also somewhat threatening. Teaching deaf learners brings with it many unique challenges with which I continue to play. For many teachers, these challenges would be enough, without also adding additional considerations. In retrospect, I can say that my desire to "try it all" made my year more stressful than it might otherwise have been. (p. 1)*

Her research questions ask:

> *(a) What prompts my decision to teach a certain topic or lesson and how much learner input (conscious or unconscious) is involved? (b) What types of informal peer literacy instruction is taking place "under my nose" and "behind my back," that is perhaps going unnoticed or unrecorded? (p. 2)*

During her research, she became "painfully aware of how few students were willing or able to direct their own learning and take control of their own situations" (p. 2). Two months into the project she writes:

> *I was completely frustrated with examining my own teaching practice. The process of analyzing myself so closely and holding myself up to such a high standard of expectation was taking all the fun out of teaching. I was totally frustrated that 'reality' was in no way matching my 'idealistic' vision. (p. 3)*

Rosenthal chose to deal with this frustration by shifting her focus from her original research questions to look at what was going well in her class. Although research seemed foreign and even negative during her attempts to work with it during the first year of the Seminar, Rosenthal is participating in the second year and plans to continue her research efforts in that context. Her experience raises questions about whether practitioner inquiry is well suited to everyone and about when and why it becomes paralyzing for some.

It also invites further study into what facilitators and other participants in practitioner research communities can do to help their colleagues having this kind of experience.

One strong finding in the study to date relates to the ways that practitioner inquiry interrupts traditional relationships between the researcher and the researched. The data so far would suggest that the processes of initiating inquiry deeply embedded in one's practice as an adult educator lead naturally to some form of co-investigation with those researched—whether learners or other staff members. All four of the program administrators' projects, for example, involved explicit collaboration with program staff, and, in two cases, this went beyond sharing purposes and methods to collaborative analyses and interpretation of the data. Only two of the completed projects by teachers seemingly did not involve a co-investigative stance, and this choice appeared highly constrained by the practitioners' particular questions and contexts. The extent to which this stance on collaboration is simply reflective of a style of teaching or administering and the extent to which the experiences of working in a practitioner research community affected this stance will be explored in future reports on the project.

The fact that practitioners develop distinctive ways to wed research processes and practice leads to a caveat that will be explored more fully in forthcoming reports, which will analyze relationships between inquiry and changes in professional practice and knowledge over time. The point here is that practitioner research can be a bounded universe; practitioners research what they identify as questions amenable to inquiry. They study what is already somewhat within the scope of their practice. The activity of inquiring into practice is not necessarily a good in itself; it needs to be informed by some meaningful purpose so that research questions and methods strengthen and/or transform what is already going on in classrooms and programs. Making distinctions among the different takes on practitioner research is important since each reflects various roles individuals, groups, and institutions play in its invention in particular contexts. These differences are likely to have radically different consequences for adults' learning, for the cultures of teaching and programs, and for the professionalization of the field.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this report suggest that inquiries conducted by teachers, tutors, and administrators that are based in practitioner work reveal substantial and pervasive tensions and disjunctions in the field. The specific questions that drive these inquiries reflect dissonance created by complex interactions among factors related to the person, the context, and the demands of daily practice. These questions are distinctive and useful, in part, because they are situated or tied to particular contexts. The particular questions and the inquiries that evolve from them, however, are related to concerns of other practitioners, researchers, funders, and policymakers in the field. To conduct inquiries based in their own classroom and program sites, practitioners select methods that are uniquely connected to and embedded in practice, thus making it possible to have the time and incentives to inquire. Furthermore, through intensifying practice as a form of inquiry, practitioners re-invent conventional relationships of teachers and learners, research and action, and the researcher and the researched.

The questions and methods selected by adult literacy educators in this project emerge neither from theory nor practice, but from the critical intersection of the two. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) explain it:

> *They demonstrate that when teachers do research, they pose neither the generic process-product question of "What works?" nor the broad interpretative question of "What's going on here and what does it mean?" Rather, teachers' research questions seem to take a different form, one that reflects their inescapable responsibility to the here and now as well as their ongoing need to construct and reconstruct intellectual perspectives for understanding their work. Hence, in a certain sense, teachers do ask "What works?" but they mean, "What works in the complex contexts of particular classrooms?--what works for whom, under what circumstances, and in what ways--as well as what 'working' means for various participants in their classrooms, schools, and communities." (p. 120)*

Thus, a major contribution of practitioner research is that it identifies and investigates a distinctive set of problems in practice and demonstrates that understanding practice cannot be accomplished by university researchers alone.

The findings presented in this report show how practitioners initiate inquiry in their own settings. The data reported here is a subset of a larger study of practitioner inquiry as staff development that is being conducted over a period of 4 years. Subsequent reports will explore in more detail the relationships between the research community of practitioners and the activities of individual researchers. We will also provide more detailed findings that relate to an emerging model for curriculum in staff development that is inquiry centered and collaborative. Several important implications for inquiry-based or inquiry-centered staff development may be derived from this subset of the data, which focuses on the ways that practitioners initiate inquiry in a variety of classroom and program sites.

Inquiry as a Stance on Practice

In a recent discussion of feminist and poststructural perspectives on educational research, Lather (1992) cites a distinction made by Sandra Harding, feminist philosopher of science, that seems relevant here. Harding (1987) distinguishes between research *method* and research *methodology* as follows:

> *Method refers to techniques for gathering empirical evidence; methodology is the theory of knowledge and the interpretative framework that guides a particular research project. (p. 2)*

In the projects initiated as part of ALPIP's first year, participants took an inquiry stance on their practice. They saw their own individual projects not simply as activities or methods but more as indicative of validated or emergent methodologies that position them as learners from their own practice. This represents a stance on their own knowledge and agency as well as a stance on collaborating with others. In a recent essay, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) argue that learning from teaching or administering (i.e., learning from practice itself) ought to be the primary educational task across the professional life span:

> *By "learning from teaching," we mean that inquiry ought to be regarded as an integral part of the activity of teaching [and administering programs] and as a critical basis for decisions about practice. Furthermore, we mean that classrooms and*

> *[programs] ought to be treated as research sites and sources of knowledge that are most effectively accessed when teachers [and administrators] collaboratively interrogate and enrich their theories of practice. (p. 63)*

When practitioners themselves conduct research, they make problematic what they think they already know, what they see when they observe their adult students or staff members as learners, and what they choose to do about the disjunctions that often exist in their classrooms, programs, and communities. The point here is that practitioner research is not a staff development technique or activity but rather a radically different way of positioning oneself as a generator, not merely a consumer, of significant knowledge for improving practice.

CONTRASTING MODELS OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Traditional staff development models do not provide the social and organizational structures supportive of learning for practitioners across the professional life span. In inquiry-based or inquiry-centered staff development, learning is integrated with practice and occurs over time. The processes build on each person's distinctive experiences of practice, and the experiences of inquiry, in turn, feed back into practice. Rather than confronting the problems of providing follow-up from workshops or other off-site activities, inquiry-based staff development is grounded in the daily work of programs.

Recent research on conceptions of teacher learning suggests that teachers must be able to situate new knowledge and understanding within the contexts of their classrooms. When knowledge is acquired outside of these contexts, teachers have difficulty bringing this knowledge to bear on actual practices (Grossman, 1992). Literacy programs, like most schools, are not currently structured to support the capability of teachers and administrators to learn from experience. In order for learning to occur, Grossman argues, teachers must have opportunities to get feedback on what they are actually doing and to understand fully the consequences of their actions. Contributing to the norms of collegiality and collaboration are what Little (1982, 1993) calls *nonroutine tasks,* defined as opportunities for practitioners to engage in new tasks that support the development of collegiality and, in turn, provide the collaborative environment that supports practitioner learning. Practitioner inquiry communities form such contexts to foster collegiality and collaboration; practitioner inquiry projects function as nonroutine tasks that affect the agency

of practitioners who empower themselves through knowing and sharing knowledge.

The literature on change argues persuasively that people are impelled to alter their comfortable routines and behaviors when there is a meaningful context and sustained support for investigating underlying assumptions and experimenting with new strategies. Rather than cast reform as increased roles and responsibilities for field-based practitioners (the prevalent model in K-12 education), structures for investigation and experimentation strengthen the intellectual foundations of practice—both in the classroom and in the program—by validating the prior knowledge and experience of those most responsible for enacting policies at the grass roots level. By privileging emic, or insider, questions and knowledge, inquiry-based staff development creates conditions in which practitioners can impel their own growth and change.

Forums for Disseminating New Knowledge in the Field

A final implication that can be derived from the project so far relates to the need for new forums for disseminating practitioner research. Practitioners need opportunities to present their inquiries to different audiences. Although both emic and etic knowledge of practice is certainly needed, the etic, or outsider, perspective has dominated conferences, training programs, and workshops intended to upgrade the knowledge and skills of practitioners. Workshops that have been based on the traditional knowledge transmission model can be transformed simply by having the presenter be a practitioner whose data are shared with others in order to look for patterns and implications. Rather than simply presenting findings and interpretations in the hierarchical fashion typically used by university-based researchers, practitioners can engage others in a close examination of the data using more or less structured forms of oral inquiry (cf. Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1991; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993 for a description and examples of research as oral inquiry). Some of the methods used in practitioner research communities over time can thus be adapted for more short-term encounters. By presenting these studies to a variety of audiences, practitioners can contribute to dialogues between audiences of practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and funders who do not often come together to share perspectives. To date, there have been relatively few forums for the presentation and publication of practitioner inquiry, and even fewer have focused on adult literacy educators rather than primarily or solely on K-12 teachers.

It is important to note that practitioner-researchers are not doing what Calkins (1985) referred to as *field-testing* research, in which practitioners test out new ideas that they are already convinced are exemplary. The goal of practitioner research is not field-testing but "the development, assessment, and revision of theories that inform practice" (p. 143). As Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1992) have pointed out, practitioner research is almost by definition case study; the unit of analysis is typically the learner, the classroom, or the program. Exploring the question of whether and how case studies contribute to the knowledge base of the field, they cited the work of Elliot Eisner (1991). He argues that knowledge growth in the social sciences is "more horizontal than vertical," not at all like building with blocks but more like linking multiple conceptual frameworks that others may use to try to understand their situations. Research studies, Eisner argues, create their own "interpretative universe." In practitioner research communities, and more generally in the field of adult literacy, knowledge will accumulate as program-based and university-based practitioners read and critique each other's work, document and disseminate their responses, and begin to create new kinds of "interpretative universes."

The goal here will not be to discover monolithic solutions to complex problems or to discover what works across all contexts but rather to build systems of communicating knowledge so that distinctions about what works in particular communities and for particular and diverse groups of learners and purposes will be more accessible to wider audiences. Practitioner research has much to contribute to the formation of a discourse community that includes as generators of new knowledge those who practice daily in the field.

ENDNOTES

1 The discussion of the historical roots of teacher research and its various iterations is adapted from Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1991 and 1993.

2 This framework is presented in a series of publications (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1993 and Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1991, 1992).

3 This definition is based on the work of Lawrence Stenhouse who defines research in general as "systematic, self-critical inquiry" and on an ongoing survey of practitioner writing.

4 Projects cited include R. Drucker (1992), *An inquiry into tutors' beliefs*; G. Branch (1992), Untitled manuscript; J. Fleschute (1992), Untitled manuscript; J. Gordon (1992), *Collaborative editing workshops*; P. Haff (1992), *The leadership link: An exploration of learners and leadership at Community Women's Education Project (CWEP)*; S. Harrill (1992), *I wouldn't let you fall: What I learned about learning and teaching from my students*; M. V. Knibbe (1992), *Using collaborative writing groups with adult learners*; P. McGuire (1992), *Experts and learners: Toward staff-directed staff development in a community-based adult education agency*; M. Merson (1992), *Literacy programs and the nature of curriculum*; J. E. Prior (1992), *Reading and writing with Gloria*; L. L. Rosenthal (1992), *Research summary*; J. Sigler (1992), Untitled manuscript.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Practitioner Researchers, Programs, Positions, and Research Questions

Name	Program and Position	Inquiry Question
Germaine Branch	Camphor United Methodist Church. Church-affiliated program that serves 20-30 adults per year in ABE classes organized by level. 4 staff.* Traditional school model. Germaine is program coordinator	How can I support the teaching needs of a teacher in my program?
Richard Drucker	Community Occupational Readiness and Placement Program. One-to-one tutoring program that serves 135 learners per year. The program is part of a larger social service agency. The only staff member,* Richard, directs the program and tutors.	What are tutors' beliefs about learning and learning to read? How might these beliefs influence the ways they teach reading, interact with learners, and accomplish their own goals?
Jean Fleschute	Community Learning Center. ABE, GED and ESL classes are offered in this community-based program serving 126 learners per year. The program has a participatory philosophy. 5 staff.* Jean is executive director and teaches 4 classes.	What happens when I use African American literature as the focus for lessons with three classes, each one culturally different from the others?
Daryl Gordon	Lutheran Settlement House Women's Program. Community-based program that is part of a larger social service agency. It serves 1,150 learners per year with staff of 50.* Tutoring, ABE, GED, and ESL classes are offered. Daryl is a teacher who also has some administrative responsibilities	What happens when my students work together to revise their writings?

Pat Haff	Community Women's Education Project, Workstart Program. CWEP is part of a larger educational program geared towards women. Workstart helps women move into the workforce or further education through literacy and job readiness classes. The program emphasizes participatory, learner-centered pedagogy. It serves 135 learners per year and has a staff of 12.* Pat is curriculum coordinator.	What is learner leadership at CWEP? How has it looked in the past, and how could it look in the future?
Sandy Harrill	Center for Literacy. Community-based program serving 2,000 learners per year with 50 staff.* Offers tutoring and ABE, GED, ESL, family and workplace literacy classes. Learner-centered philosophy. Sandy teaches 2 classes and has some administrative responsibilities.	What and how do I learn about teaching from my learners?
Marie Knibbe	Germantown Women's Educational Project. A community-based program offering ABE and GED classes, with emphasis on women's issues and participatory, learner-centered pedagogy. 80-100 learners served per year; 7 staff.* Marie teaches one class.	What happens when I facilitate collaborative writing workshops in my class?
Jane McGovern	Center for Literacy. See description above. Jane teaches 4 classes and is in charge of developing student leadership at her program.	How do the ways in which students do evaluation change and develop over time?
Peggy McGuire	Germantown Women's Educational Project. See description above. Peggy is executive director.	What should staff development look like in GWEP? If we are trying to be an authentically community-based, participatory, and empowering educational effort in all aspects of GWEP, then what constitutes staff development for us, and what is the connection between it and overall organizational development?

Martha Merson	Center for Literacy. See description above. Martha teaches 2 classes and does curriculum development.	What should be the content of adult literacy curriculum? On what basis should decisions be made?
Joan Prior	Pennsylvania School for the Deaf Adult Literacy Program. School-based literacy program for deaf adults with varying levels of fluency in American Sign Language and English. 36 learners, 4 staff.* Joan tutored in a class and worked one-to-one with a single learner.	What is happening and will happen in this process (tutoring) and what will I learn from this experience?
Beverly Prunty	Metropolitan Career Center. Community-based program focusing on ABE, GED, job readiness and job training. 350 students per year, 40 staff.* Traditional schooling model with structured curriculum.	What happens when I use African American literature to teach various concepts, rather than life skills or job related reading materials?
Lore Rosenthal	Pennsylvania School for the Deaf Adult Literacy Program. See description above. Lore teaches one class and supervises up to 12 tutors who assist in the class.	What prompts my decision to teach a certain topic or lesson and how much learner input (conscious or unconscious) is involved? What types of informal peer literacy instruction is taking place under my nose or behind my back that is perhaps going unnoticed or unrecorded?
Janet Sigler	Temple University Adult Learning Programs. University-affiliated ABE program with 3 different classes grouped homogeneously by level. 80 learners per year served; 8 staff.* Janet teaches 1 class.	How can current students be involved in helping nonattending students return to the program? (The hidden question which evolved as the project progressed was: Whose idea is this project anyway?)

* All staff numbers represent paid staff only. All statistics are for the 91-92 program year.